

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON DECOLONIZATION

Chapter XI of the Charter (Declaration regarding Non-Self-Governing Territories) sets out the obligations of administering Powers for the Non-Self-Governing Territories. Those States recognize that the interests of the inhabitants of the Territories are paramount, and accept as a sacred trust the obligation to promote to the utmost their well-being. Under Article 73 e of the Charter, they transmit to the Secretary-General information on economic, social and educational conditions in the Territories for which they are responsible.

To accelerate the process of decolonization, the General Assembly in 1960 adopted the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (Declaration on decolonization) which proclaims that the subjection of people to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights. It affirms that all peoples have the right to self-determination.

The Declaration calls for immediate steps to be taken to transfer all powers to peoples in Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories or all other Territories that have not yet attained independence, in accordance with their freely expressed will and desire.

In 1961, the General Assembly established the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (Special Committee on decolonization) as the main United Nations body concerned with the progress of all people under colonial rule towards self-determination and independence.

The Committee:

- studies information submitted under Article 73 e,

- regularly examines the application of the Declaration and makes recommendations to facilitate its implementation,

- dispatches missions to Territories to obtain first-hand information,

- calls the attention of the Security Council to colonial situations it deems a threat to international peace and security,

- receives communications and hears individuals or representatives of organizations and Governments,

- makes recommendations on dissemination of information on decolonization with a view to mobilizing public opinion in support of the cause,

- reviews foreign economic and other interests operating in Territories, and military activities and arrangements which may be impeding the process towards complete decolonization,

- examines the assistance provided to the people of the Territories by specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations system, and

- examines the items on its agenda in plenary meetings or assigns them to one of the two sub-committees -

- the Sub-Committee on Small Territories and the Sub-Committee on Petitions, Information and Assistance.

The work of the Special Committee is reviewed by the General Assembly at its plenary meetings and through its Fourth Committee. The Fourth Committee's recommendations serve as a basis for Assembly decisions on decolonization.

The Special Committee consists of 25 Member States: Afghanistan, Bulgaria, Chile, China, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Ethiopia, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Mali, Papua New Guinea, Sierra Leone, Sweden, Syrian Arab Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, USSR, United Republic of Tanzania, Venezuela and Yugoslavia.

It currently follows the application of the Declaration to 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories -- American Samoa, Anguilla, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, East Timor, the Falkland Islands (Malvinas), Gibraltar, Guam, Montserrat, New Caledonia, Pitcairn, St. Helena, Tokelau, the Turks and

Caicos Islands, the United States Virgin Islands and Western Sahara -- as well as the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. The Committee annually reviews the list of Territories to which the Declaration is applicable.

The Special Committee has consistently reiterated the view that factors such as territorial size, geographical location, size of population and limited natural resources should not prevent the peoples of the remaining Territories from exercising their right to self-determination, as it is ultimately for those peoples themselves to determine freely their future political status in accordance with the relevant provisions of the United Nations Charter and the Declaration, as well as other relevant United Nations resolutions. In this connection, the Committee has also reaffirmed the importance of fostering an awareness among the peoples of those Territories of all the possibilities open to them in the exercise of their right to self-determination.

Reiterating that it is the administering Powers' responsibility to create conditions in the Territories to enable their peoples to exercise freely that right, the Committee has called on those Powers, taking into account the peoples' expressed wishes, to expedite the decolonization process. It has noted efforts made towards training and placing citizens of the Territories in public service positions and other sectors of society where contributions to development could be made, with a view to running an independent country.

The Committee has also reaffirmed the importance it attaches to the cooperation of the administering Powers. In that connection, it has called upon those Powers to participate or continue to participate in the work of the Committee and to invite United Nations visiting missions to the Territories under their administration.

The Special Committee held two regional seminars in 1990, one in the Pacific and the other in the Caribbean region, in observance of the thirtieth anniversary of the Declaration. The primary objectives of the two events were to provide the Special Committee with the opportunity to discuss the specific problems of the remaining dependent Territories, most of them small island Territories, their special needs and the challenges posed by their geographical locations and other specific conditions and to draw up plans for the rapid decolonization of those Territories, bearing in mind the provisions of the General Assembly resolution calling for a complete decolonization by the year 2000.

[Extract from "Decolonization -- the Task Ahead," a book published by the U.N. in April 1991.]